

The Honorable Doc Hastings
Remarks on H.R. 1285
House Natural Resources Committee
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands
April 17, 2007

Chairman Grijalva:

I want to thank you and Ranking Member Bishop and other members of the Subcommittee for holding this hearing today.

I am here this morning to speak in support of H.R. 1285, legislation that I introduced along with Representative Dave Reichert, which would convey a small parcel of Forest Service land to the King and Kittitas Counties Fire District #51 – also known as Snoqualmie Pass Fire and Rescue. Under my proposal, this land would be conveyed at no cost, but would have to be used by the Fire District specifically for the construction of a new fire station or it would revert back to the Forest Service.

Snoqualmie Pass Fire and Rescue serves a portion of two counties on both sides of the Cascade Mountains along Interstate 90. This is a very rural area, with a small number of full-time residents, but it is also the major transportation corridor for goods and services between Eastern and Western Washington, as well as a destination for winter recreation. This area is also often the scene of major winter snowstorms, multi-vehicle accidents, and even avalanches. The Fire District is often the first responder to incidents in the area.

For decades the Fire District has been leasing its current site from the Forest Service. They operate out of an aging building that was never designed to be a fire station. Through their hard work and dedication, they have served their community ably despite this building's many shortcomings. However, with traffic on the rise and the need for emergency services in the area growing, the Fire District needs to move to a fire station. They have identified a nearby site that would better serve the needs of residents and visitors alike. This location would provide access to the interstate in either direction, reducing response times in emergencies. The parcel is on Forest Service property, immediately adjacent to a freeway interchange, between a frontage road and the interstate itself. Much of the parcel is currently a gravel lot.

I am aware that the Forest Service does not normally support conveyances of land free of charge. However, I believe an exception should be made in this particular circumstance because of the important public service provided by the Fire District, the heavy traffic and emergency calls created by non-residents in the area, the distance of Snoqualmie Pass from other communities with emergency services, and because of the high amount of federal land ownership in the area, which severely limits the local tax base. In addition, I would note again that under my proposal, this land would revert back to the Forest Service if for whatever reason a new fire station is not built on the property.

Passage of this legislation would not guarantee that a new station would be built – the Fire District would have to work hard to gather the financing that would be required from state and local sources, as well as any applicable federal grants or loans. However, the conveyance of this site at no cost would help this Fire District hold down the overall cost of this project.

I am pleased that Chris Caviezel, the Chairman of the Fire District Commission, was able to come to Washington, DC today to explain more fully the needs they have.

I look forward to working with this Committee, the Fire District, and the Washington House and Senate delegation to find a solution that meets the emergency services needs of the area. I thank you again for holding today's hearing.